

August 1999 Vol. 6 No. 8

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the spare change magazine



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Debt Relief justice in third world

by **Rebecca Lippiatt-Long**

Nicaragua's debt load is 800% of their GNP. That means if every citizen and every business and the government doesn't spend a single penny (even for food) for the next eight years the country will still be in debt (because of interest).

When a country is this far in debt, each citizen pays for the debt with their health, their education and their environment. Children are born owing more money than they will earn in their lifetimes. This is what Scarboro Missions, one of the many organizations involved in the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, is speaking out against.

In June, more than 15 million people petitioned the leaders of the world's lending nations to write off the debt of the world's impoverished countries. This petition also called upon the leaders of the G7 countries to prevent future debt by promoting "sustainable economic and social development instead of supporting measures demanded by international financial institutions that erode health care, education and the environment."

Organizations involved in the initiative believe the debt burden carried by impoverished and developing nations is not only unfair but immoral.

Bob Schmidt from Development and Peace pointed to South Africa as an example. "They are currently paying debts incurred by the former apartheid government; this money was used to oppress the very people who are now paying it off. Canceling the debt is simply justice."

Creditors argue releasing indebted countries from their debts would create "moral hazard." This is the idea that people or governments will make bad investments if they know someone (the International Monetary Fund - IMF) will cover their bad investments. Opponents also argue that canceling debt would be punishing the "middle income" nations who are "good performers" and would be rewarding those countries who have poor (by IMF definitions) financial policy.

Bob Schmidt suggested that this argument has more to do with psychology than economics. Creditors, whether countries or companies, have a great deal of power over those who owe a debt. If the debt is canceled, creditors are no longer in a position of power. This power relationship can be seen in the paternalistic language used by creditors; countries whose economic politics are similar to the creditor's are called "good performers."

The Jubilee 2000 campaign has two main goals. The first goal is the cancellation of the unpayable debts of the world's fifty poorest countries. Countries like Nicaragua will realistically never pay off their debts. Because money is lent at floating interest rates, many countries have payed off the original loans but continue to sink further into debt because of interest accumulation.

The second goal is to change the way loans are given. The IMF and the World Bank lend money to desperate

countries under certain conditions; to qualify for a loan a country must adopt structural adjustment programs (SAP's). A country must follow the program for six years before they qualify for a loan. In the meantime they accumulate more debt.

SAP's are troubling to many critics as they take financial decision making away from a country's own government. SAP's involve privatizing, selling off or otherwise discarding government programs that have "low economic return," specifically in the international marketplace. Education is not profitable. Healthcare rarely makes money. Food grown for internal consumption brings no revenue in the global economy. Countries are forced to abandon these investments and reinvest in cash crops such as soya beans, coffee or cotton.

Generating revenue for the country as a whole should be good. But consider that in the Ethiopian famine of the 1970's, while hundreds of thousands of people starved, Ethiopia's cotton production rose by 20%. In Mozambique, IMF insistence on privatization has resulted in 25% unemployment among the industrial workforce.



Bob Schmidt maintains that indebted countries are forced to take loans to pay interest on existing loans. To get loans governments must abandon social programs which then places the burden of debt squarely on the shoulders of the poor. By maintaining the status quo, wealthy nations of the world are keeping poor nations trapped in a cycle of poverty.

At the Koln Summit in June, the G7 countries responded in part to the petition signed by 15 million people. Rather than eradicating the debt of the world's poorest countries, they reduced the amount owed by canceling some of the debt. Overall, the cancellation was about one third of what the Jubilee 2000 initiative called for.

Earlier this year, Jean Chretien had challenged the G7 leaders to meet Canada's goal of 100% forgiveness of bilateral debt (debt between two countries). It remains to be seen if Chretien will meet his own challenge or back down from his commitment and follow the Koln initiative.

In response to Jubilee 2000's goal of changing the way new loans are given, the Koln Debt initiative calls for a new framework that includes poverty alleviation and civil society involvement.

Despite the fact all of their goals weren't met, The Jubilee 2000 committee is "cautiously optimistic" about the initiatives coming out of the Koln Summit. They vow to continue to campaign and take the Koln promises "off the page and into people's lives."

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An interview with Wendy McNeill, Edmonton's folk and good cause songstress

Rebecca Lippiatt-Long

OV: Do you write your own songs and your own music?

WM: Own songs, own music. I'm self taught so I have a different style I think. (She describes her style as "edgy folk, not like Joan Baez.") I like to see the whole guitar as an instrument, like I do percussion on it.

OV: Do you emulate other artists?

WM: It's funny, in all honesty I am probably the least musically knowledgeable musician you'll ever know. I have, well, I have more than five CD's now but that's because of touring, people swap or give me CD's.

I get comparisons all the time. Annie de Franco, Alannis Morissette, last week I got Tori Amos . . . basically any woman that is not Sarah McLachlin or not a rapper.

OV: Do you resent being compared to other people?

WM: It's a fact of life I guess. It depends on my mood. It's nice that the comparisons are broadening - before it was always Annie de Franco.

OV: Do you think your music is changing or people's perceptions are changing?

WM: I think my music is changing. I am a lot less angry than I was a couple of years ago. Like "To Whom It May Concern" was totally, well I can't say totally angry, pretty angry, pretty self-centred . . . "why are you doing this to me", now I think more, "why are we doing this to each other?"

OV: So growing up and taking responsibility for yourself?

WM: Yeah, realizing that I am not in a place where I can point fingers at anyone else, cause I don't live perfectly, so . . .

OV: So your last tape was about yourself?

WM: Yeah, then I started recording that other CD, (Wendy recorded a CD last year that neither she nor the producer were very happy with and consequently was not released) to be called "Sung", in the I Ching that means conflict, so I was kind of going through this transition at the time where there was a lot of conflict. I spent a

year and a half on that and obviously in that year and a half I was doing other writing. I think [it not being released] was happening for a reason. At first I was really upset about it. I think the songs I have written in the last year are way more worthy of being on a CD.

We are on a lawn by the university and several maintenance people are removing signs warning people to keep off the grass because they sprayed herbicide. Wendy gets distracted.

WM: Sorry, that really makes me mad! Like what's the big deal if there is a couple fucking dandelions? Sure, screw with my DNA, there, that's much better. Sorry.

I remember when I was nineteen or twenty, I think I was nineteen, I was with Greenpeace I was pretty angry still and I was doing a lot of canvassing, door to door work, trying to pump public awareness, protesting and stuff like that, I just about drove myself nuts, getting all this information on the Green Link, all the really disturbing statistics. Some people are strong enough to handle that but for me I tried to get strong. I'm not the kind of person who can handle that. So the least I can do then is if people that I respect are involved in these things still, putting something together, gig-wise, yeah I can do that.

I've had to get over feeling like a schmuck, like how dare I write about this little feeling, when at this benefit you're playing for people who have seen people getting their hands cut off. It makes me feel like, how dare I- I don't have anything to say. Then I realize that I don't have their experience, but playing at a benefit gives me a couple of things. It gives me the experience and a chance to meet them and to grow as a person. I don't have to be all things, I don't have to be the guru who's seen it all. I'm going there to add some entertainment. That's my part in it.

I believe that if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. But before I used to be so hard on myself for it. If I wasn't fixing it all then I'm fucked and the world is fucked. Now [I realize] I can't be part of the solution in every part of the pie, but I can do something.

OV: What about other social issues?

WM: [The Mental Health Association] is a cause that I am definitely [behind].

Homelessness, I don't know the exact stats, but I am pretty positive that a lot of people who are homeless, it's because of a mental condition, not being able to quite cut it in this fast paced city life. That's really close to me because I have two family members who are out on the streets, and another one who is on AISH now, so he has a safe place to be now. It's a soft spot for me.

I remember once, I was driving around in the inner city, I was with this girl. She saw this guy, and [she] was pointing and laughing at him cause he was pissing on the street. And it was a family member. This was at a time when I was still kind of mortified, kind of embarrassed, thinking, "that's a reflection of me," and judging.

I realize that I am not so far removed from that. With my income bracket I am not so far away.

OV: Do you hope to continue on with your music?

WM: Yeah, I'm in the middle of writing a grant proposal for this CD and in it they want to know a marketing plan, what you're going to do in six months, a year, what's your five year plan. That's been really helpful because . . . in writing this stuff down, in solidifying it, it was like yeah, this is what I want to do, it is full time work, this means the work that I'm doing, I'm probably not getting a lot of money for, but it brings me total bliss. So it is what I want to do.

Wendy likes the freedom of being an independent artist but said she wouldn't turn down a lot of cash if someone was to offer it to her.

WM: If I had lots of money I'd buy some land and have organic farming and bring in stressed out business people for part of the year and get them doing yoga and eating organic food and getting their hands in the dirt and then send them out to spread their word to their business people. For the other part of the year have teenagers from the inner city who are mad and frustrated and don't know how to voice that other than though acting out and try to give them ways of healing . . . I think the world would be a better place if everyone could find their avenue of expression and they could get to the truth of themselves.

Letter to the editor

I hope I never need welfare!

"Oh God, may I NEVER need welfare!" Feeling the pain of a recipient friend of mine and knowing "second hand" what a trap it can be, is already too close. From her descriptions, its worst torture for me would be compulsory attendance of these "preparing-a-resume-and-applying-for-work-courses". Most of them are shallow, pretentious bullshit. Not much discernment is needed to see that the middle class people teaching them often aren't true "believers". They know (or should) that these courses only work for their own kind....."nice" people conditioned/socialized since toddlerhood to be predisposed toward them. But having always done things by the book, they dutifully fart them out anyway. They seem to never do any soul searching, asking how much they really DO benefit the people they're supposed to. Good heavens, that might stop them from acting in accordance with what seems to be their number one principle and sometimes ONLY talent....."knowing which side butters their bread". Getting straight talk from someone is about as easy as pulling teeth from a shark without using painkillers. I recently experienced that reality.

My welfare recipient friend, let's call her Elaine, recently told me of one demand placed on her by such an instructor in one of these

courses. They were to spend many days dropping off a minimum of ten resumes per day in person. Anyone with ANY experience being unemployed with a welfare level income, knows that's usually impossible. If you're depending on the bus and/or bicycle as most people in her situation would be, you'd need a VERY early start, bus connections much better than Edmonton's average, and ten places not too distant from each other.

So I phoned Elaine's all wise instructor to mention these realities, and ask if any students would face being cut off welfare, if they couldn't meet this quota.

After much "play dumb" stalling of not understanding what I was asking, she admitted to me that she had no idea how tough it is getting around Edmonton without a car. She'd always had one, and had never in her working life depended on transit, trying to afford it on welfare income.

Getting an honest answer from her, about welfare cut-offs for any students failing to meet the resume quota, was like trying to nail jello to the wall. I exerted mega efforts to not scream at her, over her constant, evasive bullshit. But FINALLY, she came right out and SAID it!....."No it's NOT a case of deliver ten a day or else". My next question was....."don't you think it's wrong to not SPELL THIS OUT TO THEM CLEARLY", considering the stressful hell "never knowing" can be?

She justified this deception with nice "weasel words" that I'll translate into blunt English. The course assumes "welfare people" to be unworthy of enough respect to clearly state reasonable lim-

its to. They must be kept on their toes by being always unsure of where they stand. This is done by laying down unrealistic expectations, and convincing them that these must be met. Only then is there any hope they'll perform at a realistic level. They'll ALWAYS try to do less, no matter HOW LITTLE you ask. As we ended the call, she dutifully earned more brownie points in the "use-of-the-right-buzzwords" department, by thanking me for my "input". As I write this, I regret not having taped the call.

I'll finish with two questions. (1) Do people like her have a clue how richly they deserve our contempt? (2) Could OUR VOICE do a write-up on any of these courses that have a proven track record of consistently working? If they exist, people need to know about them.

Ed Frey, Edmonton

Editor's response.

We have done stories in the past that were written by people who had negative experiences with Welfare programs. We have yet to print one of a positive nature, or document a case where the individual on Welfare benefited from taking a Family and Social Services (FSS) course. We will continue to look at this issue as long as there are people who have grievances about the way they are treated by FSS. In the "Where are they Now" series we have been running there have been examples of people's lives being further damaged due to rigid measures used by FSS.

If there are programs that work, we here at **Our Voice** would like to hear all about them.

Support group for judicial integrity.

Victims of Trauma related to Justice, Corrections and Law Enforcement.

by **Allen Blaines**

The process of healing and bridge building must be available to those persons who have been emotionally devastated by experiences with the justice system.

Socialization activity that leads to rapport, empathy and the habits of solving conflict in competent ways is part of a healthy personality formation. It is greatly needed by all persons.

Success in becoming a valued member of the community depends on a person's effective social network. When a disturbance in a person's life occurs that involves the law, this can result in a destructive support network. When this is compounded by disinformation or faulty communication involving the services that are given to the affected person by the justice apparatus, enemy formation dynamics may result. This causes reinforcement of emotional pathology, which inhibits interaction that is compatible with the needs of a civil community.

This support group was created as a result of the steering committee of the Alberta Human Rights and Civil Liberties Association holding a forum on the reassertion of Ethics in Law at Edmonton City Hall, June 12, 1999. The basic fact that emerged from this forum is that a need exists for reaffirming the habits of effective interaction between people especially when profoundly negative experiences have influenced a

person's attitude and relationship with justice. In order to enable connection and affirmation to be present between the traumatized person and the community, a formalized support group will need to ensure that the following needs are cared for in the life of the traumatized population group.

- * Strategic legal resources for dealing with lawyers and judges.

- * Peer experience sharing with administrative matters in legal process.

- * Life management when confronted with destructive situations such as unfairness.

- * Links with projects such as Safe and Caring Communities Program.

For further information and to aid in developing a more comprehensive Support Group that will be able to link the necessary components, please call Alan at the Alberta Human Rights and Civil Liberties Association. (780) 477- 6905.

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Homelessness is becoming news...well how about that!

I've been wondering if all of the hard work taking place here in the inner cities of Canada is beginning to pay off. For years people have been living on the streets or very near the streets in rundown housing or with dwindling wallets. And for years there has been a movement by these people and people working on their behalf to expose this problem, to lobby governments to do something about the growing number of homeless people.

It's mostly been like banging our heads into a brick wall and the harder we ran at it the more it hurt. But dizzily we carried on. And now- a break through?

Late last year a joint task force on homelessness was developed by the province and the city of Edmonton, designed to look at identifying the problem of homelessness in Edmonton and looking for short and long term solutions. They've completed a report that is pretty enlightened, but still a bit short-sighted. They found on one night, in Edmonton, 836 homeless people. Most people who work in human services in the inner city will claim there to be much more. One source, taking into consideration the number of people staying with friends under temporary arrangements and on the cusp of being completely street bound, claims there may be as many as 5000 homeless people in our city.

None the less it is a serious issue and the politicians and the people who have the power to make a difference are beginning to appear on our doorsteps. They are people other than Pam Barrett and Raj Pannu, the

two New Democrat MLA's, who really have been the only politicians interested in homelessness in the past.

Most notably was Claudette Bradshaw, a Liberal MP and Minister of Labour. She has been appointed the Federal Coordinator on Homelessness. As part of a fifteen city jaunt across Canada, she came to Edmonton early in July to hear from people who work with the homeless and most importantly from the homeless themselves.

She was given a quick tour of the inner city and the shelters, but the heart of her quest was a community discussion forum held at Alex Taylor school, where close to 300 people showed up to eat the free food which was provided. About 100 people stayed to talk about their experiences, good and bad.

So what did Mrs. Bradshaw hear?

"People are saying that we're not lazy, we're not stupid. Give us a chance. We need support services and most importantly we need the system to listen to us.

"We have to listen and react to what the community is telling us. The federal government and the provinces have to work together to get this problem fixed. We're wasting the potential of human lives," she said. "And all I can do is try."

She's right. All she can do is try and listen and I saw it with my own eyes. She was listening.

Someone else who has been lurking around is Reform Party MP Peter Goldring.

Mr. Goldring too has been appointed by his party to examine the issue of homelessness in Canada and attended the community discussion. He even came to my office one day. He sat right across from me and

Editorial OPINION

Our Voice the spare change magazine

talked about his findings and his ideas and he listened to what I had to say and, more importantly, he too is listening to the people who are homeless.

Mr. Goldring is hearing about people's needs for community and safe affordable shelter that is subsidized. He talks about the wasteful derelict housing that poses grave danger to homeless people along with taking up space where good quality housing could be built if the city and other parties would get their act together. We'll see. The Reform party has usually seemed pretty uninterested in the poor.

His first thought is to to expand the George Spady Centre, which is a homeless person's last resort.

"I can't believe the Spady Centre is actually forced to turn people away," said Goldring.

No doubt.

The solutions to homelessness have always been very complex. We're not dealing with a homogeneous group of people. Though if the right people finally start listening and start acting on what they hear, I, for one, think we will finally start moving that brick wall. ♦

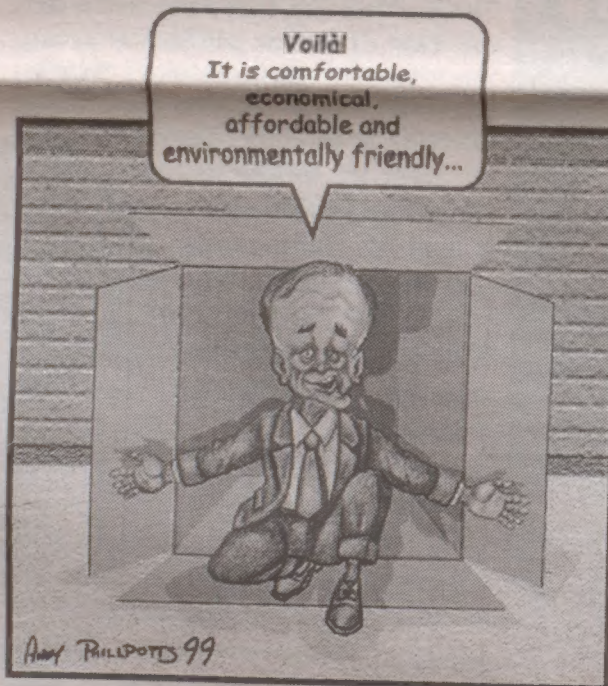
Michael Walters

GIMME SHELTER

The shortage of affordable housing for low income individuals, both of the working and non-working poor, has not garnered the national press for Edmonton that it has for Calgary. Perhaps because our river valley is deeper, wider and better treed than Calgary's. Edmonton's poor face numerous barriers to finding safe and comfortable accommodation. The primary barrier is financial.

This is not a situation that has emerged overnight. There has been steady and systematic pressure to keep incomes low while letting the costs of shelter and other basic needs rise. There have been various financial mechanisms employed; taxation, service charges for public services, discouragement of unionization, manipulation of the Bank of Canada interest rates, relaxation of rules for employers in matters of hours and benefits, retention of a very low minimum wage and slashes to income stabilization payments of any kind. Like a live lobster put in a pot of cold water with a fire under it, it doesn't notice that the temperature is rising until it is cooked. Citizens have become accustomed to accepting less and less in the way of both quality and value for their shelter budget.

I entered the rental housing market 35 years ago. I paid \$25 a month for a horrible, illegal, basement room beside a suspiciously smelly furnace. At minimum wage I received \$35 a week for 45 hours of work, \$140 a month. According to the wisdom of the time, shelter costs should cost no more than a maximum of 25% of my income. This room fell well within this range. As my wages rose, my standard of accommodation also improved, always within that 25% range. This held pretty stable during the time in which I acquired a husband and children. During the mid to late seventies we were still poor, living on approximately \$1200 a month, \$350 to \$400 of which went to shelter costs. This was edging up past the 30% range, however since we lived in the country we defrayed some of these costs by growing a lot of our own food.



The government's solution to the housing problem...

By the mid eighties I was raising children alone and in the early nineties went back to school to learn skills to re-enter the work force. At this point the income for our family of four, three of whom were in that adolescent growth spurt, was \$1400 of which \$850 went to shelter costs. This was substantially more than 50% of our income. Unable to grow food, we ate a lot of generic cheese and macaroni dinner.

In the mid nineties things got really tough. I had finished school but had not been able to acquire steady work, only isolated small contracts and sales of artwork. Two of the kids were over 18 and not eligible for SFI funding in my name. One had left home, leaving three of us living at home on funding for two. Essentially all of the \$798 that we received from SFI went to shelter costs. We fed ourselves off the few contracts I could find and the food bank. My adolescent sons were missing a lot of school and I was worried about them doing something foolish to buy more

food. At this point to house three of us, it took 100% of a forty-five hour a week minimum wage job.

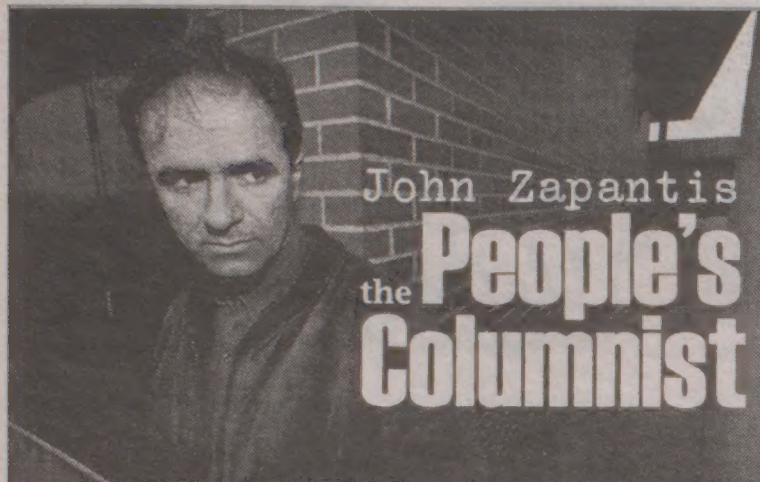
The three of us became homeless in early 1997. I lost the damage deposit on our domicile and left huge arrears on water, power, heating and telephone bills so that it is impossible for me to reconnect any of these services in my own name in this area in the future. I spent two years "sofa surfing" until I finally ran out of places to hide.

More than thirty years after renting my first place, I found myself paying \$250 a month in another horrible illegal basement room, with a monthly income of \$300 to \$350 from selling OUR VOICE forty hours a week. This is only slightly less than the \$400 a month an individual employed in what is now considered full time employment, 20 hours a week at minimum wage, or the \$394 an employable individual can receive from SFI. The \$250 for a room is fairly reasonable. Standard inner city costs for a small room is \$300.00 a month. Many of these residences are illegal, badly maintained, dirty and in dangerous neighborhoods. For people in the lowest income brackets, housing costs have increased by a factor of 10 and income has increased by a factor of 3.

Neither Ottawa nor the provincial governments have done anything to stop or even slow the progression of shelter costs escalating from 25% of income to 75% of income for the lowest income group. The factors that leave substantial numbers of the most vulnerable people in our society, who can only generate \$400 a month facing \$300 a month shelter costs, have been documented and analyzed to death. If all the money put into studying poverty was given to poor people, there would be far less poverty.

Like the lobster in the pot, the public at all income levels seems to be oblivious to the fact that as far as shelter costs go, Canadian citizens are cooked to death. ♦

Theresa McBryan



John Zapantis the People's Columnist

Loving people helps Diane Bachelder offer a helping hand

Diane Bachelder's love for people has given this young woman the incentive of helping others. Diane works in Edmonton's inner city as an Independent Living Support Co-coordinator. Her office is located in the Bissell Centre.

Diane's position as an ILS Co-coordinator is funded by the Alberta Mental Health Board.

The ILS program is a collaborative effort between the Bissell Centre and the Boyle Street Co-op. Along with Diane, Steve Segec is the other ILS Co-coordinator and he works from the Boyle Street Co-op. Steve is actually moving on at the beginning of August and a replacement will be hired.

Diane's responsibilities as an ILS co-coordinator are to help people who suffer from an array of chronic and persistent mental illnesses and to integrate them independently back into their communities.

One of the priorities include referring homeless clients to emergency accommodation centres. The next step is to follow up on the progress of the individual by making further arrangements toward providing them with social assistance, along with suitable and permanent housing.

As well, Diane arranges contracts between clients and ILS workers, who work directly with people to develop life skills that can be independently applied to a private living environment.

Some of these skills include teaching clients how to budget, giving them cooking skills, showing them how to do their laundry and an assortment of other skills needed for independent living.

An example of the positive nature of the program and the support of the community was a summer camp for clients which involved six agencies: The Boyle Street Co-op, Operation Friendship, People in Need, Urban Manor, the McCauley Apartments and Meadows Lodge.

Diane is a former graduate of Grant MacEwan

Community College. She completed a two year program and obtained her social work diploma in 1993.

Diane sincerely believes that by offering life skills to people living with mental illnesses, it is a step in the right direction on the road to independence.

"We're here to get them some help. We're not in their lives 24 hours a day. The idea is to teach (mentally ill) people about their resources, which are available in their community, so they can use them for what they need," says Diane.

The human side of Diane Bachelder gives her the incentive of working effectively when providing a viable service to clients who really need her moral support.

"I want people to be able to live in their own homes and be happy. I want people to have enough money. We all know people struggle to survive on social assistance. I want them to have decent affordable housing. I want them to be able to have food in their stomachs at all times and not to be worried about losing their place continuously. I want them to be happy with their own lives.

"I've learned a lot from people that are in the program. I've learned how money isn't everything. People in the inner city are very real."

Where are they now?



I have known Tom and Patty for four years. They have two boys aged 6 & 7. They live in a three bedroom apartment where their rent is \$525 per month plus the other usual bills. There are also the costs for their children, like school fees, bus money, etc.

About two years ago Tom got a job in one of the hospitals as a porter. They gave him a pager and told him he was on 24 hour call. Even

though Tom was working full time, they still couldn't make ends meet. The problem was that Patty had a serious case of Colitis (disease affecting the bowels) which is even further aggravated by a swollen disk in her lower back. In Patty's case this caused her right leg to lose its function and she had to hobble around with a cane. It made it difficult to get her kids to the the bus and to school. The medication she required cost more than \$400 per month and Tom was not getting paid enough to cover all of their expenses.

Fortunately Social Services agreed to subsidize the cost of Patty's medication, as long as Tom provided them with a monthly report indicating that his income was not increasing. He did that and things were easier for the next couple of months.

However, as we all know, every now and then there is a month where instead of two pay periods, there are three. It depends on how the pay schedule falls.

When Tom filed his monthly report, it indicated that he had made more than in months previous. This would seem like a simple thing for

Social Services to understand, but they didn't.

They informed Tom that his Monthly income showed the ability to cover the cost of Patty's medication, even though the following month he would only be paid twice and again the family would come up short.

Social Services refused to listen and Patty was forced to cut down on the medication she required.

At that point Patty's life became unlivable. The pain was constant and it was impossible for her to help her children like she was able to with the medication. The boys had to fend for themselves at a very young age. They began to struggle in school and Patty's health began to deteriorate. She even collapsed on the street one day just blocks from their home.

Recently the family has been able to afford Blue Cross. Tom's job offered no benefits so this was the road they were forced to travel, but it's better than what life was like for Patty before.

This is another case of no social support and low paying, no benefits jobs and this is where Tom and Patty and their two sons are now. They are poor, but Patty at least can live with her pain and raise her sons, while Tom does his best to support them. ♦

by Kas

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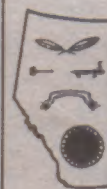
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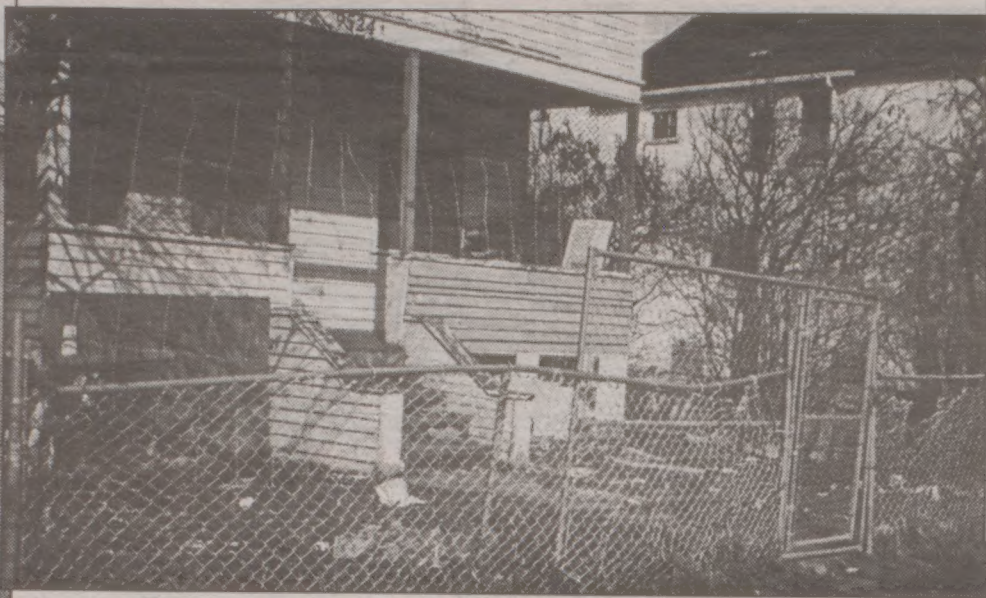
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Housing - some personal journeys. One family's story

Living life on limited income is tough enough, but if you are facing homelessness with a family, this is truly a situation that strikes total panic in the heart and soul.

Our family recently faced this situation when we were evicted from our home of six years. The owner was in financial trouble and wanted to move into our home because they lost theirs.

For six years we had paid a total of \$56,000 in rent to our landlords. No work was done to the house during that time. We ended up with nothing to show for it; no security, no down payment for a house, no money to move with because of the high rent. We were broke and felt beaten.

As soon as we received our notice, we started looking for alternative housing. The alternatives were bleak indeed. With a fairly large family you need enough space to house everyone so bargains are hard to find. Suitable housing would have cost between \$150 - \$300 more per month and we were already stretched to the limit.

With options diminishing, we turned to friends. We knew that if we could get together a down-payment we would be able to purchase and pay less than rent. As Christians we had faith that things would work out just fine but when you're faced with being homeless, the waiting is very stressful. I couldn't concentrate on work. I felt like I was drowning. What made it even harder was that we were in this position not because we did something wrong, but because our landlord was in financial difficulty. It was hardly our fault since they own at least 10 other properties that we know of.

Well, ours is a success story, a friend came

through and loaned us the down payment and the owner of the house is carrying the mortgage. Our payments are less than we were paying for rent and we are hopeful for the future. At least now, our monthly payment are building up equity and not being poured down the drain. The sad thing is that many others in our situation are not so lucky. They will end up in shelters, their children will be apprehended and their lives will be destroyed. We thank God that we were blessed and we say a little prayer for others who find themselves in similar situations.

One woman's experience

I was living with my daughter, but I was unable to put my wheelchair into her house so I had to move. I called everywhere, but all the places that were wheelchair accessible were too expensive.

After searching for 2-3 months, I found what I thought was a perfect subsidized apartment. I was so happy. It was December and I needed to get my chair in out of the cold. The place was wonderful. There was a grocery store about half a block away. I was very relieved.

Now for the next snag in my life. I found out that the apartment was actually not subsidized. I was number 304 on the waiting list for a subsidized unit. I was lost. The rent was \$375 per month and my income was \$520. I couldn't do it!

I had to move out but it was January and there was no place for me to go. I couldn't live in the street. Where would I plug in my electric wheelchair? I didn't know what to do.

Realizing that there was no place for me, I

attempted suicide. It almost worked, but I was found too soon. I ended up in the hospital and they wouldn't release me. I still had no place to go. I wished I was dead.

While I was in the hospital someone from Poverty In Action came to see me. She told me about the Philia Advocacy Group and that they might be able to help. I phoned them and they told me that if my doctor wrote a letter outlining my situation and emotional state, I would qualify for more rent money from Social Services. I was so relieved that I would not be homeless. A few months later my subsidy was approved and I am now very thankful for my place and the people who helped me stay there. I can now concentrate on making my physical and emotional life better and can more fully participate in my community. ♦

These are two success stories which could have ended in tragedy. The reality is that for far too many people the situation does not resolve itself in this way. In the case of the family, we often see the children turned over to Child Welfare and the parents are homeless with no income.

In the case of the single woman, eventually the situation becomes too much to bear and the suicide attempt becomes successful.

By not having enough safe and affordable housing we lose a great deal of human potential and end up spending more money in crisis intervention. We need to invest in programs like the Edmonton Housing Trust and The Central Edmonton Community Land Trust. Both programs are just getting started but offer wonderful alternatives. Find out what successful programs are out there and support them. ♦

Written by the staff of Poverty in Action



Illustration

Peter Goldring
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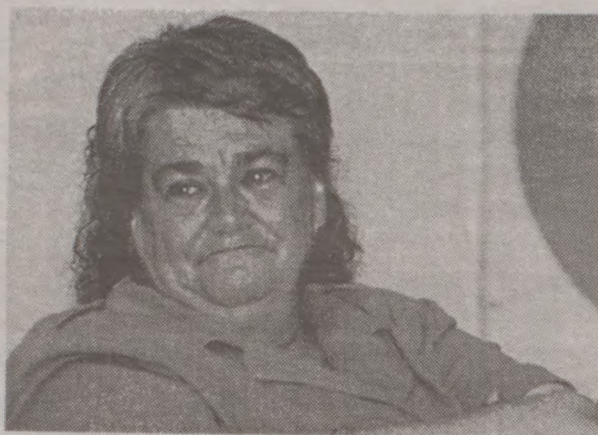
MINISTER HEARS FROM HOMELESS

BY R.H. MACLACHLAN

Federal Minister of Labour, Claudette Bradshaw, who co-ordinates the federal government's programs on homelessness, had an opportunity to hear from Edmontonians experiencing the problem, as well as those trying to deal with it, at a town hall meeting held at Alex Taylor School on July 8. It was the second of her 15 visits to communities experiencing a homelessness problem.

Calling the meeting to order, moderator Divona Herzog said the purpose of the meeting was more to hear constructive solutions than to re-state the problem. She said she wanted to hear "Your experiences, your solutions, your success stories."

Speaking on behalf of Edmonton Community Services, Joyce Tustien summed up the key findings of the recent joint provincial-municipal task force on homelessness, to the effect that on one evening, March 18, 1999, 836 persons, 112 of them children, had no permanent place to live. Of these, 523 were in shelters, while 313 were "on the street". The count was made by checking with the shelters to see how many people were registered and by walking throughout the downtown area, asking people "Do you have a permanent place to live today?" and "Do you know anybody who does not have a permanent place



Claudette Bradshaw

to live today?" This figure is probably low, as the researchers (on the advice of the Edmonton Police Service) did not enter condemned buildings to seek homeless people, and had no way of finding people who were staying with friends or relatives temporarily.

Long range research by the task force included a variety of focus groups representing various stake holders in the issue, and a literature search of the projects underway in other communities worldwide. These findings were presented to Mayor Bill Smith and to Community Services Minister Dr. Lyle Oberg and Municipal Affairs Minister Iris Evans on May 14 in a report titled "A Call To Action". Copies are available at Edmonton City Hall.

In her opening remarks, the Minister stressed the importance of all levels of government, as well as the community and private sectors, working in partnership. Then the floor was open for discussion.

Despite Herzog's initial request that the discussion focus on constructive solutions, the bulk of the speakers focused on re-stating the problem—that homelessness exists for many reasons—unemployment and unemployability, family breakdown, substance abuse, mental and physical disability, conflict with the social services system, and so forth. Other speakers put forth concepts that have been heard before, but without constructive details. Some of them were "turn the child tax credit system into a guaranteed annual income", "there are enough street people with brains who can figure out ways to get houses without government", "a house is not a home, just to provide shelter is not enough", "tear down the condemned houses owned by the City of Edmonton and construct low-income housing", and "use existing surplus government buildings (notedly the old Federal Building and the Charles Camell Hospital) for low income housing." One novel idea presented was to move surplus housing from closed military bases and other Federal installations to areas where homelessness exists.

Pointing out that providing shelter is not enough, one speaker noted that while there has been a proliferation of group homes for the mentally handicapped in recent years, there are no standards for the quality of service, and "most other people in Edmonton don't want those kind of people in their neighborhoods."

Perhaps the best comment on the issue that services and shelter must go hand in hand was given by one mentally ill middle-aged gentleman who said "I have to get into trouble with the law and go to jail to get the help I need."

Klein drops the ball on housing issues.

Since 1995, the vacancy rate in Edmonton has fallen from over 10% to just over 1%. There are currently 2500 people on waiting lists for social housing in Edmonton alone and over 5500 people in Alberta; there are over 830 homeless people in Edmonton, including 112 children. (Based on a one night count by the Edmonton Homeless Task Force.)

Edmonton and Alberta are currently going through a dramatic housing crisis and Premier Klein's extreme obsession with paying down the debt is compounding the harmful effects of rising housing costs.

And as costs rise, those people lucky enough to have a home are dedicating more and more of their income to pay for shelter. Many of Edmonton's tenants spend more than 50% of their income on shelter. Our own government considers 30% to be high but acceptable; 25% is the ideal. When half of the household income is needed merely to provide a roof over their head, there is little left over for food, health care, education and savings.

In such a situation, there is no opportunity to save, and without savings, the family has little hope of ever putting together the necessary down payment for their own home. The family is locked into an endless state of "getting by"; never getting ahead.

For now, however, Premier Klein seems content to dump the problem in the municipalities' collective lap.

The catch is that the provincial government has drastically slashed funding to municipalities.

In a province as wealthy as Alberta, there is absolutely no excuse for working people enduring the threat of not being able to afford their own home.



Pam Barrett

It's time for the provincial government to take action.

Klein's Conservative government recently passed a law requiring 75% of all budget surpluses to be applied to the debt. Such a dangerous obsession with eliminating the debt is causing more problems than it solves. Fiscal prudence is good and New Democrats support it, but what we cannot support is Tory style, fiscal fanaticism. Splitting future budget surpluses half and half between debt payments and restored spending

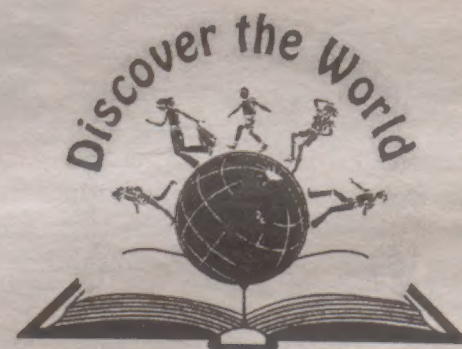
would be far more appropriate and sensible - if only Ralph would listen and care.

by Pam Barrett, leader of the Alberta New Democrats.

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Looking for Jesus in Winnipeg

BY RODNEY GRAHAM

I set out early one sunny Sunday afternoon from my home in the Wolseley district of Winnipeg...in search of Jesus.

A lot of homeless people were being swept off the street in preparation for the Pan Am games due to begin July 23, 1999. The streets of skid row have new smiling faces of cobblestone and wider, more pedestrian friendly sidewalks. Siloam Mission, regarded by most street people to be their favourite, was expropriated and hasn't reopened elsewhere yet.

Jesus has been well known for years in Osborne Village, and downtown. He would act as a control in my research-to see how the homeless have been swept off the streets, and to what extent the intimidation went. Jesus has been panning the streets of Winnipeg for years. No one knows what he wrote on the myriads of small pieces of paper stuffed in his shirt and pants making the pockets bulge.

Have you seen Jesus?

I stopped a short distance from my home on Ruby St. I went into a bakery on Westminster Ave. I asked a young woman behind the counter, "Have you seen Jesus?" She looked baffled, "Pardon me?" she said. I repeated the question.

She whispered something to an older woman behind the counter.

"You'll have to leave unless you want to buy something," the older woman said.

I popped the question to a group of nurses sunning themselves beside Misericordia Hospital.

"Tell us what he looks like", an elderly nurse asked, winking at the others who in turn giggled.

"Oh, hell, we have pictures of him in the hos-

pital," a younger nurse volunteered. The group seemed amused.

"I met him the other day," a nurse finally became serious, "I gave him some change and I asked how he was doing and he said 'that the police had warned him and other panhandlers not to go near the businesses on Portage and not to go downtown anymore.'"

A hell of an experience

Not finding Jesus right away, I decided on another tack. Dressing up like a panhandler I strode downtown and positioned myself on Portage avenue near Main St.

Holding out my hand I asked, "Spare change?" and, "have you seen Jesus lately?"

"Get a life!" one well dressed young couple shouted.



Winnipeg street Jesus

After about five minutes I was feeling about the size of an earthworm. It was the side-ward glances and the way they rushed past

and avoided eye contact that really hurt. I felt like an unwanted refugee.

That night I couldn't sleep. I had a terrible



headache. I got dressed and slunk down to the grocery. That's where I met him.

"I've been looking for you," I said.

He looked at me with a frown.

"I need two more bucks for a pack of smokes," he said.

"I'm writing about the street sweep of the homeless, you know, for the Pan Am games," I told him.

"I don't want to get involved," he said, "I'm just trying to pan here man."

I gave him a twoonie.

Walking to the entrance of the store I noticed the clerk turning the key locking the door. I was a couple of minutes late apparently.

The least of these my brethren

It seems there is less and less space for people like Jesus, for welfare mothers, dissociate youth, for the unfortunate and the misunderstood....

Perhaps it isn't important where Jesus is at any given moment, or why he's homeless (that is too easily shoved under the carpet). Maybe what is important is how we treat people like Jesus. How, as a society, we treat people like him... how we treat single parent moms, refugees, wayward youth, and any of those in our society who find themselves on the street...like Jesus...

So you're diabetic, well too bad!

MICHAEL WALTERS

So this fella shows up in my office a couple weeks ago. It was a Monday morning. He had this "story of injustice" as he put it.

His name is Reg and he is a diabetic man. He was given his usual amount of insulin on the previous Thursday morning by his family doctor. The amount usually lasts him a week or so. Unfortunately, due to an oversight, he realized on Saturday morning that he was lacking the appropriate tips for his special needle that he requires to inject his insulin. So he figured this was no big deal. He walked up to the University hospital and asked them if they could provide him with a tip so he could take his insulin. As most diabetics will tell you, it is of utmost importance that he takes his insulin. However the staff at the University hospital informed him that there was no diabetic nurse on staff and that he would have come back on Monday.

Well Reg informed them that he would be dead by Monday if he didn't take his insulin. No matter. They told him there was nothing they could do for him. So he weakly and barely made his way over to the Royal Alex. Same story. No diabetic nurse and he was told to come back on Monday. You would think that health care professionals would know that Reg wouldn't be able to wait until Monday to take his much needed insulin. And all he needed was a tip to make his needle work. They couldn't even give him that nor give him a shot of insulin. They said they didn't know his history.

Reg's next plan of action was to try to purchase the tip from a drug store. At the first place, he discovered that the tips were sold in bulk boxes for more than \$30. He only had three dollars. He tried to convince them to sell him one tip. That was all he needed. The drugstore wouldn't comply.

You can imagine that by now, Reg must have been somewhat disillusioned as well as incredibly weak and dizzy.

So he tried another drug store, then another. Still no luck.

By about ten o'clock on Saturday night, Reg still hadn't taken his insulin. It was more than two days since he had. He wasn't feeling too well.

At that point he walked into a near-by bar and sat down. He was feeling terrible and didn't know what he would do. He was angry and frustrated.

A fellow approached him and asked him if he needed some help.

Reg told him his story. He showed the stranger his insulin and explained how he needed the tip to be able to inject it. At that point the stranger reached into his pocket and pulled out his very own insulin needle with the appropriate tip intact. He lent it to Reg and Reg was able to finally take his insulin. He was lucky.

Before coming to Our Voice on that Monday, he went to the Edmonton Journal. He was angry and needed to tell his story. They wanted nothing to do with him or his story. They called the police and the police picked him up and dropped him off in the inner city.

Gee, if you're poor and you're diabetic and need a bit of help with it, well things don't look good. ♦

Homelessness - No Place To Call Home

It is often said that how we view ourselves as a society must be measured by how we treat the least advantaged among us. Do we blame society's unfortunate for their problems, or do we work towards helping them overcome their problems? In Edmonton, you and I both know that people here face many struggles in terms of getting through each day and night. Twenty years ago-even ten years ago-the problem of homelessness was considered non-existent or perceived to affect only a small number of people in a city's inner core. We now know that the problem of homelessness is a growing one, affecting persons from all walks of life. Many who are homeless are those who are currently in the midst of battles with alcohol, drugs or the conflicting pressures of life itself, all of which ravage some minds of the sense of perspective and future. These are not people who choose to be homeless, any more than a state of illness is a matter of choice. There are very few who would choose the status of being without an address to call home, let alone choose to face the days and

nights of the seasons without any shelter whatsoever. Very few choose a heating grate over a warm bed. Government has a role in ensuring that no one is homeless for reasons other than clear choice-specifically, that shelter was present-



ed as an alternative, and rejected. The main federal role in housing is one of ensuring that tax revenues are distributed fairly to the provinces, so that each province has the resources to provide the shelter that residents in each province need.

This means that the "homeless problem"-the problem of people who want shelter and are without-is one that must be addressed by the Alberta government. It must be addressed in terms of awareness of the plight of the homeless and knowledge of how funds distributed to municipalities to help the homeless are being used.

New and innovative ventures to assist the homeless are being developed, as evidenced by the recently opened Boyle-McCauley Project. A co-operative

project by many departments. Who is responsible for the homeless? The answer is clear: the homeless are the responsibility of all who cherish a caring society. As the recently appointed Member responsible for Homelessness for the Official Opposition, I

will provide whatever assistance is appropriate in my elected role, as well as in my capacity as a concerned Edmontonian. I welcome all suggestions and ideas to help. In upcoming articles I will be making commendations for solving the homelessness problem in Edmonton.

Peter Goldring
Member of Parliament
Edmonton (Center)East



Balloon busker to Balloon Gang

BY LINDA DUMONT

Like the pied piper of Hamelin, the balloon man drew a crowd of children at the Street Performers festival. Dressed in a sparkling purple vest, with a pouch full of balloons, Stephen Dubetz stood in the shade blowing up balloons and fashioning them into animals, flowers, and other forms. He was kept "horrendously busy".

Dubetz has taken ballooning from busking in Farmers' Markets and festivals to a full time balloon business.

"To be able to do something you enjoy takes the dirty word out of "work," he said. "I started doing it just for fun and friends." Now he is proprietor of a balloon store.

For Dubetz, the balloon business began with a visit to a friend's in 1990. His friend had a little boy, Morgan, who was nearly three.

"We saw a balloon man on Mr. Dress-up. We were both fascinated."

He decided to make balloon animals for Morgan's third birthday. Dubetz is originally from Smoky Lake, but has lived in Edmonton on and off for the past 18 years. He studied Engineering Design and Drafting at NAIT, but couldn't find work in the field because of the rapid changeover to computer design. Then he returned to NAIT for a one year commercial baking course.

Dubetz was working as a commercial baker in Victoria when his father passed away in 1994. He gave up his job and returned to Alberta to spend time with his mother.

"I didn't want to go back on night shift baking," he said. "I thought I could make a little pocket money at the Farmers' Markets."

He was soon busking two days a week, at Old Strathcona Farmers' Market, and the Callingwood market.

As a busker, he took his job seriously. He searched fabric stores "high and low" for interesting material, and had shirts and vests hand made in colorful prints - an Easter egg design for spring, and a shirt with special teddy bear buttons. He designed a pouch to hold the balloons which he blows up without the aid of a pump.

"It's much harder work; it takes it's toll on me," he said. "But I think it looks more professional. I have more control and it's faster."

In August, 1995, Dubetz met Max Phlarddau, the originator of The Balloon Gang. Phlarddau was running it as a home based business in Spruce Grove.

Through Phlarddau, Dubetz was able to get balloons at a wholesale price. Phlarddau also arranged a Tuesday night booking at the Pizza Hut for Dubetz.

When Phlarddau opened The Balloon Gang in 1996 as a retail location on Stony Plain Road and 149 Street, Dubetz went to work for him. That summer, when the Balloon Expo came to Edmonton, Dubetz took classes in balloon art and design. He learned to make bouquets, center pieces, balloon sculpture, and to do balloon decorating. Dubetz challenged and passed his Balloon Certification exam.

Jan. 1, 1997, Dubetz bought the store. As proprietor of The Balloon Gang, he has gone from busking for pocket money to "three staff and a bank loan." Although he enjoys his work, like any other job it can be stressful. He works seven days a week 12 to 16 hours a day, and he's takes pride in his business.

"We're the best," he said with a grin. "We go through more helium and balloons than any other balloon company in the city."

The store does balloon bouquets of every kind for any occasion that can be celebrated, as well as decorations for parties of all kinds. Dubetz still makes balloon animals, but most of the kids he sees now are at corporate picnics, company Christmas parties, and other private parties.

Dubetz remembers his fellow buskers from the market. He even stops by occasionally to do some busking.

"It's a good bunch of people," he said. When he can, he gets bookings for some of them, like Lady Dolphin, the face painter who worked next to Dubetz when he was up front at The Strathcona Farmers Market.

"I miss the Farmers' Market very much," he said. "Now I have to make a special trip to get a good ring of sausage." ♦

by Rodney Graham

Winnipeg, M.B.- Although Canada has once again been named number one by the United Nations on the overall human development index, which combines data on life expectancy, per capita income, and access to education, those who do not meet the status quo in our country suffer in restrained silence—particularly immigrants.

The fact that nearly 30% of food bank users in Manitoba are working people would not appear in the index for example.

A plethora of obstacles meet even the wealthy immigrant: Visiting students, for example, must pay more than double for the same courses taken by their Canadian counterparts.

Immigrants with high educations and skills still cannot find adequate employment and are forced to take menial employment at minimum wage because of discriminatory policies requiring them, to have "Canadian" work experience. And their degrees and/or diplomas are often not recognized.

Politician's views

Jake Hoeppner, Manitoba Reform Party M.P. from Lisgar, Manitoba says that we need more stringent immigration screening to weed out "criminals" but admits that local immigrants have had a good work ethic.

"As long as we have an expanding economy along with any immigration flow things will go well, but we must be very wary of the risk of not obtaining law abiding immigrants," said Hoeppner.

"We need to have a good screening process. As well, when we have high unemployment, people are more apt to get nervous with letting more immigrants in."

Pat Martin, N.D.P. M.P. immigration critic says present immigration policy is unjust and that immigrants have a very low unemployment rate.

"All of our immigration system is structured to be a barrier to keep immigration to a minimum", he said.

"The right wing are still feeding us the myth that immigration causes high

Canada's immigration injustice

Part 3 (final)



unemployment....it's an absolute lie," said Martin. "The evidence shows, in fact, that immigration is an engine for economic growth."

"Sir Wilfrid Laurier said that Canada should have 100 million people by the year 2000... Trudeau said that 50 million would be an acceptable number."

"The fact is," said Martin, "Canada is underpopulated, particularly in the prairies."

"We need to tear down the barriers, get rid of



Heavy burdens are often put upon immigrants.

the racist head tax, put out the welcoming mat, and say 'Canada is again ready for another large wave of immigration'."

Compassion solution possible?

"Canada's laws should be inclusive rather than exclusionary," says Ingrid Chen, immigration lawyer and immigration reform advocate, "we should welcome people to our shores- but what

has happened over the years is that we have adopted a method of exclusion rather than inclusion.

"It is extremely important that Customs keep in mind - that the greater evil (when an illegal immigrant is caught) are the ones assisting the migrant.

"Illegal immigration," Chen said, "like the black market, thrives because it is forced underground, now when there's a broadening of, or relaxing of the regulations, people will come out from the black market, come out from the underground, but, if the legitimate means are cut off from them (such as with the poor seeking entry to Canada), then," she added, "they're just going to use illegitimate means to reach their goals. That is why we should have more open immigration.

"There is a great fallacy in regard to those who would think that immigrants go on welfare and burden our society," says Chen. "History itself proves that immigrants work very hard often doing work others refuse.

"Ideally, because our population is shrinking on the basis of its birth rate - our birthrate is not keeping up with our declining population (aging population). We ought to increase immigration to match this trend. I think that if a person does not have a criminal record they should be allowed in. If there is a question of worrying about them burdening our welfare system they could have a limit of them applying for it- they would have to work for at least one year first. (After one year they can be free to not be victimized by business persons and others capitalizing on the immigrant's vulnerability). There should be a relaxation on the criteria of sponsorship and - who you can sponsor to enter our country, right now poorer families have a hard time sponsoring family members and only well off fiancées can sponsor."

Chen said that the reason some people are opposed to immigrants is because some people see immigrants as threatening to their way of life....and because "some people"....are not very amendable to change.

Chen noted that in the convoluted world of immigration, those most guilty of wrong doing are the ones creating the policies, not desperate, or misguided migrants. ♦



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Retraction:

Our apologies to Jean Friesen, M.L.A. for Wolseley. Our June edition should have read, "An anonymous caller" and should not have been attributed to Friesen.

Next Month in Our Voice

The North American Street Newspaper Association conference (NASNA) is coming to Edmonton in the year 2000. Our Voice will host the NASNA event which will take place from July 20-24 at the University of Alberta. There are more than 75 street publications in North America and next summer they will all be in Edmonton. In next month Our Voice we will talk more about NASNA 2000 and NASNA 1999 and the conference which recently took place in Cleveland Ohio.

Lee Stringer was one of the original street paper vendors in North America. Lee vended New York's Street News, North America's first modern day street paper. Today he is the published author of the book *Grain Central Winter*. We will talk to Lee and take a look at his new book.

Just how many people in our country can't read or write. We'll take a look at illiteracy and who is working to make people literate as well as some of our favourite books that people should be able to read.

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poems

Witch Hunt

by Kasandra Caldwell

To my future husband, I ask this:
Will you marry me?
I love you dearly.

But they say I can't love,
that I am shallow
cunning, intelligent
beautiful, crafty
manipulative
greedy, money hungry
hateful, spiteful
old, young, used up
too fresh.

They say you can't be loved.
You are too ugly, old,
young, rich, poor,
black, brown, white,
wise, ignorant,
innocent, street wise.

Will you marry me,
and let me love you
truly and dearly

I love you
but they are burning me at the stake,
refusing to let me love you,
refusing a kindness to our love,
refusing a word of hope and faith,
and strength and courage,
refusing love.

Will you marry me?
Will they let us be brilliant?
And to shine on the world
like little energy balls?

Will you marry me
without their consent?
Will you thrive in my presence,
even though this alarms others?

Will you stride to the alter
for all the world to see?
Loving me?
Loving me?

Will you say,
"This little witch is
my little bitch" and
that's fine with me?"

Will you marry me?
And gasp with glee,
"why, that's my woman over there!"
And to me: "I'm delighted with thee!
Will you marry?"

Will you jump over the broom
and shout "I'm the groom!"
Make room!"

Will you marry me?
And set me free
of the witch burning tree?

Living Candle

by Hendrix Christina Buscha

Insidious... berings... all enticing pain,
Endless beguils to play my dirty game
Loaded with a gun of guilt
Wrapped in a shroud of shame.

My heart...
My anguish...
A self-destruction
Knowing no fear

So insightful -- yet
Unable to see
This very engulfing
And fractured reality.

I am a living candle
Consumed so others may see
The many things to be learned
In the light of my agony.



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Our Voice, the spare change magazine

Our Voice needs Mac or IBM compatible computers and desktop publishing software (Quark Express, Pagemaker) for our writers and vendors.

Donations can be dropped off at the Bissell Centre 10527-96 Street or call 423-2285 and they can be picked up.



Fighting the Odds

NEW
FICTION
PART SEVEN

(In last month's installment, Hope has trouble balancing job and family responsibilities. When she's absent or late for work, even because of sick children, she finds Claire, her boss, not the least sympathetic. Is her precious job at risk? A dark-haired man with blue eyes and a crooked nose walks into her life.)

by Allison Kydd

Hope couldn't get the man named Donald out of her thoughts all day. Something must have shown on the outside, since Stephen purposely collided with her and asked her in his Humphrey Bogart voice if she was in love. That distracted her even more, and she came very close to starting an avalanche in the book display she was setting up in one of the front windows.

Hope was proud of her display and the fact that it'd been her idea to show off one-of-a-kind classics. It was the book called *Joseph and His Brothers* which gave her the idea. Many books didn't move because no one knew they were there. Maybe they'd order more literary books by people like Thomas Mann if she could prove they would sell.

Claire would probably change the display or maybe just say it didn't work and to take it down. She seldom let the newer staff do displays, though at meetings she claimed she gave equal opportunities to all. But Claire was like that.

She couldn't be trusted. Many times, she'd asked Hope to confide in her, asked about her breakup with Kenny and how she was managing on her own. But when it came to a real situation, like today, where Hope needed some understanding, Claire seemed to be on a power trip.

Hope felt betrayed. She'd expected a woman would be a kinder boss. Even though Claire had never been married, you'd think she could imagine how a divorce was a big adjustment. Neither did Claire know how it was to raise one child, let alone three, nor how Hope was afraid she'd fail in some terrible way and ruin her children's lives.

Kenny's attitude made it worse. They'd finally gotten around to going to a lawyer; actually, Hope had arranged it and Kenny, after two no-

shows, had made it to one meeting. Though they were each heading their separate ways after the Legal Aid office, he'd followed her outside. Right there on the sidewalk, he grabbed her arm so hard he hurt her.

"You'd better be doing all right by my kids," he said, "or I'll be taking them away from you so fast you won't know what hit you."

After all this time he still talked about hitting. And she believed him. Maybe he would have beaten her on the spot if it hadn't been so public. She also feared that--Veronica or no Veronica--if she let her guard down he could just move back home, whether she wanted it or not.

Today, however, Hope wasn't worrying about either Claire or Kenny, though Donald of the blue eyes and crooked nose didn't come back to the store, and she knew she was silly to think he might. She also knew she was silly to be thinking about him at all. It'd just been so lovely to meet him, to have him defend her against Claire. She was tired of being always on her own, tired of having to fight all her own battles.

And he was so good looking he'd taken her breath away.

As she finished the window, she let her imagination go wild. After all, she hadn't even had a date since Kenny left. She almost never went out, though she'd gone with a church group to a movie at the cheap theatre a couple of months ago. The movie was called *The Apostle*, and she didn't understand it. How could the hero be both bad and lovable? Should she like him or not?

She often felt ignorant compared to other people. Most had gone to university; they hadn't gotten married right out of high school because they were pregnant. When she'd miscarried two months later, Kenny said she was working too hard, and that's when he made her quit her job. Now it seemed as if she could never catch up on the time she'd lost. Even Stephen, who was probably the nicest person at the store, made her feel dumb.

One reason Hope never went out was she didn't really have any friends other than through the church. The other reason was money, for her income from the store was all she had. By their

separation agreement, Kenny had refused to make support payments. She'd signed away the right because she just wanted the marriage over.

But she couldn't say he wasn't generous. In fact, sometimes it made her really mad to see the expensive clothes and gifts he bought. She could have gotten the children things they needed for that money, or paid things like Shelagh's Irish dancing lessons, intended to keep her from missing her Da so much. And Shelagh was growing so fast her shoes always seemed too tight even for dancing. Then there was Margie wanting to go to camp and Gareth longing for a bicycle he could ride over curbs, like the ones his friends had. It was such a relief Gareth finally had friends, though he never brought them home to visit.

When Hope's workday was over, she grabbed her jacket and rushed for the door. Though she said goodbye to Stephen and the others, she didn't bother to look for Claire. Sometimes just trying to be nice gave the other person too much power.

Over a supper of omelettes and salad, the children noticed something different about her.

"You look all glow-y today," said Margie. "Did something good happen?"

Hope blushed and laughed, but before she could think how to answer Shelagh chimed in.

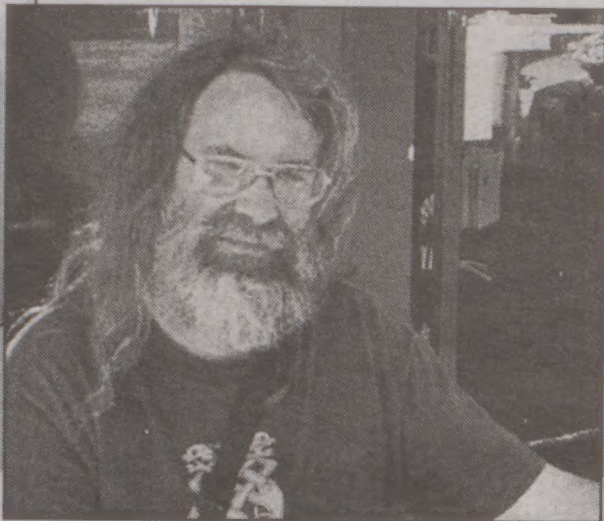
"I had a nice day swimming," she said. "Can we go swimming together sometimes?"

"Of course, my darling, my lovely, of course we can." She picked her littlest up from her chair and gave her a twirl.

Even Gareth got into the act by volunteering to do the supper dishes out of turn. How, thought Hope, can I ever feel sorry for myself again? What does Claire have to compare with this?

Street Seen

by Cec Garfin



Glen has been handicapped with Cerebral Palsy all his life. Despite this challenge he has acquired a B.Sc. University Degree, majoring in mathematics. He has done everything he wants to in his life and will continue to do it. If he won a million dollars in the 6-49 he would still play his whistle in public. Unlike the flute this is a wooden whistle like kids used to carve from willow in the spring.

Glen is 48 years old. He has lived in Edmonton for eight years. He was born in small town Saskatchewan and lived most of his life in Lethbridge and other small towns in Alberta. He has 2 brothers and one sister. He has been playing the flute for seven years. He also plays the guitar and sings. He has played with up to seven other musician friends, including his significant other. Celtic music is his favourite music, but he also plays a

wide range of folk.

He likes Edmonton the best. He likes the people's responses to his music and the support they give for his efforts. In bad weather conditions he can be found playing in Churchill pedway. In fine weather you'll find him on Whyte Avenue between 103rd and 105th streets.

Glen has a message; "Busking is not about poverty. Don't base money as a prejudice. If a busker doesn't look poor it doesn't mean you shouldn't give him money in appreciation of his talents. If you are unable to give money, expressing your appreciation in different ways can be just as important as the money."

"This also applies to *Our Voice* vendors, street merchants, bottle pickers and panhandlers. Many are not there doing what they are doing by choice but as a necessity to survive day to day in bad circumstances that occur. ♦

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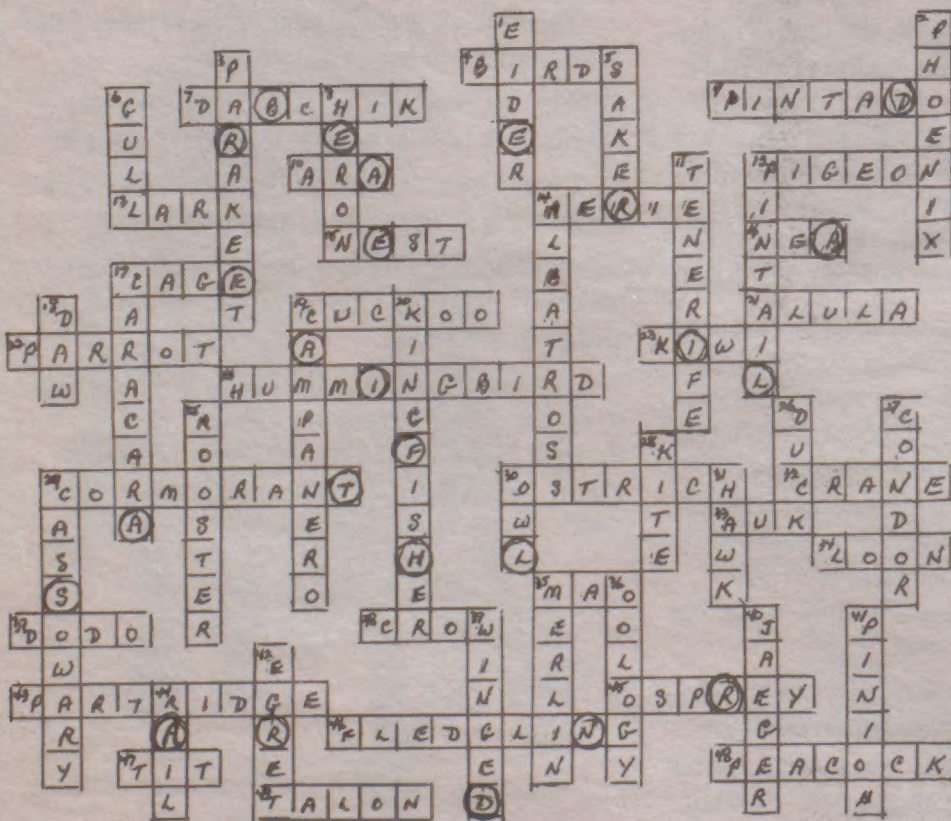
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**Answers to
July puzzle:
All birds are
featherbrained**



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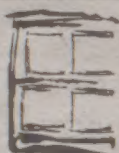
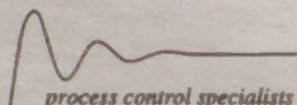


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IN EDMONTON

Theresa McBryan

by John Zapantis

Our Voice vendor Theresa McBryan has established a solid reputation with fellow vendors. She's truly the consummate people friendly salesperson and a woman of many talents.

This unique and gifted "Lady of Our Voice" is a writer and cartoon artist whose works were recently published in **Our Voice** for the first time.

Theresa started vending **Our Voice** in December of 1998.

She enjoys the moral freedom that **Our Voice** offers to those who need a voice in the community.

"I vend because it's a political statement. I don't like the way things are run, I don't like the way the government runs. **Our Voice** has the courage to print this point of view. I go out there and plug it."

Theresa vends to supplement her income as a graphic design artist.

"Vending's a very poor income, but it's my only income other than design work."



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vendor has a
BADGE!

Our
Voice



V
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B
A
D
G
E

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Number _____

Authorised by _____

OUR VOICE VENDOR'S CODE

- I will be sober at all times while working.
- I will be polite to all members of the public.
- I will vend only in areas that are authorised.

CITIZEN OF THE MONTH



Pat Fleury

by Cec Garfin

Pat Fleury is 43 years old. He is married with four children. He was born in Russell, Manitoba and has lived in Edmonton off and on for fifteen years. He has been a volunteer for 3 years at the Boyle Street Co-op; helping to answer phones and clean up. Pat likes to hunt and fish. The one time welder has been going back to school to upgrade his skills. Pat helps at bingos to raise funds for the Co-op as well as the Theatre Network, Boyle Adult Literacy School and Drislews Charter High.

Café Mosaics

Our Voice Magazine
and Café Mosaics'
Citizen of the Month

EVERY MONTH in **Our Voice**, we will be featuring someone who has gone the extra kilometre in their lives or in their careers to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

The Citizen of the Month will receive a dinner for two courtesy of the Garneau Café Mosaics on Whyte Avenue.

HAPPY PAGE

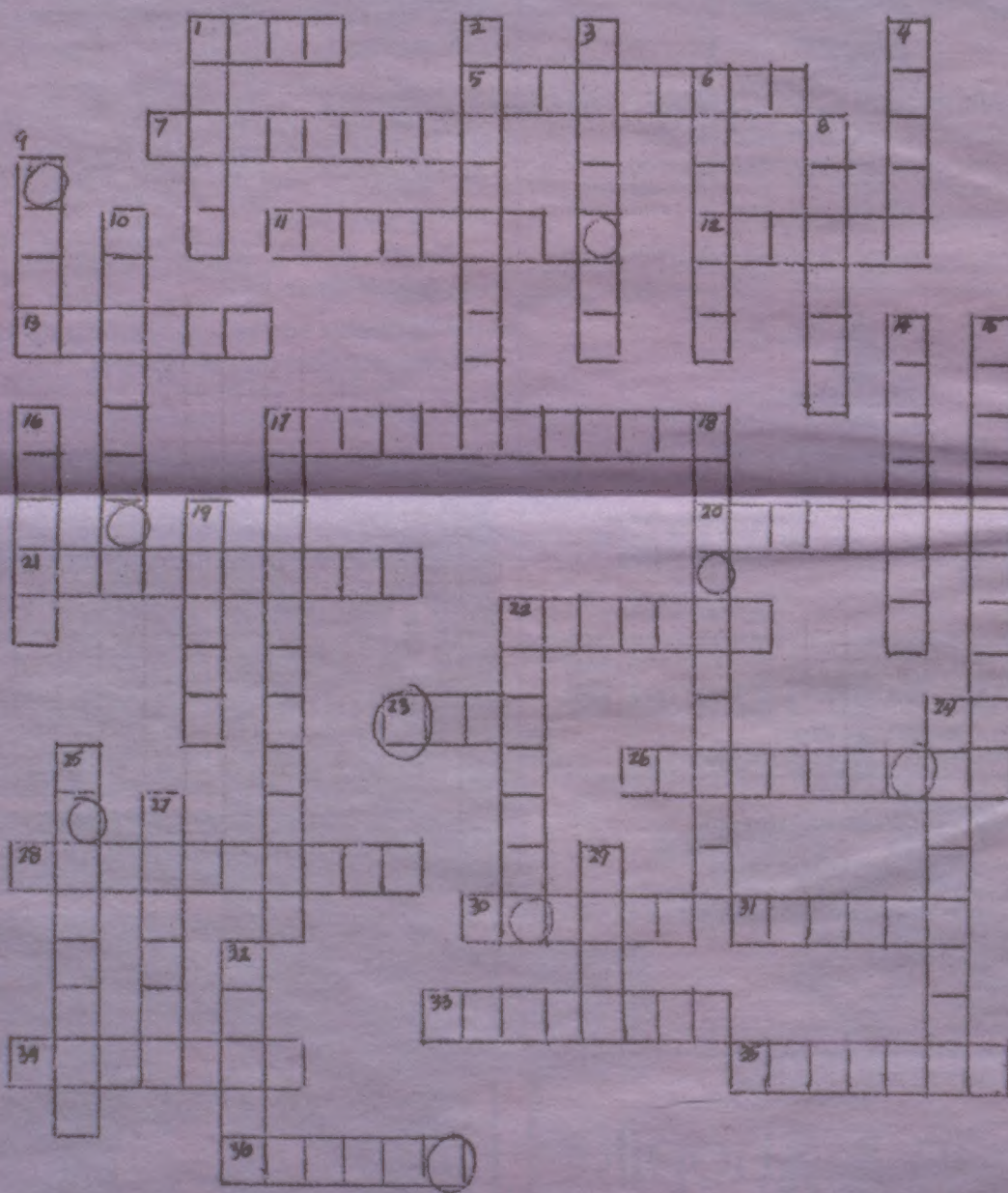
SUSAN'S HANDSCRATCHED WORD SIZZLER

ACROSS

- 1 incite
- 2 enemy
- 7 double-tongued
- 11 an offender
- 12 purpose
- 13 espy
- 17 allies
- 20 puzzling
- 21 rob
- 22 net, take
- 23 alert
- 26 abusive
- 28 blame
- 30 apprise
- 31 debauch
- 33 argus-eyed
- 34 rob
- 35 cabala
- 36 detective

DOWN

- 1 AIDS
- 2 distortion
- 3 bear witness
- 4 pursue
- 6 insight
- 8 riddle, mystery
- 9 act
- 10 witness
- 14 greed
- 15 hit, bat
- 16 buy off
- 18 evasion
- 19 name
- 22 censure
- 24 Cain
- 25 decode
- 27 shed blood
- 29 calaboose
- 32 inklings, pointers



Answers in next months issue



Soupline Bob

